

A Work Project, presented as part of the requirements for the Award of a Master

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# **What do people do at work when they** **are not working?**

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## **Abstract**

**Topic:** What do people do at work when they are not working?

The purpose of this work project is to explore the activities people engage in while they are at work but not working. Twenty interviews were conducted with young workers from different occupational areas to map out those activities, to understand the reasons why people engage in certain routines and behaviours and what are the consequences for the productivity of the employee and for the company as a whole. The first conclusion is fact that people need some time to exit a role and enter a new role. The second states the importance to break between long periods of work. The third concerns the need to reconcile personal issues and professional lives. And the last conclusion links the need to be in touch with the outside world with the socialization requirement among workers.

- KEYWORDS – Leisure, Productivity, Breaks, Nonwork

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## **1. Purpose of the Project**

Whether you enter in a Lawyer's office, a Multinational Company or even a library with students there is at least one common type of behaviour: everyone, regardless your status, your professional recognition or your age, devotes some time, some work time, to perform activities not related to the actual job they are there to do. Clearer it became that although people stay on the job all day they tend to make small breaks and employ some of their time to activities not work related. The main focus will be on people that have established 8 hours work day and have the ability and means to do those activities.

With this project, the goal is to understand the challenges people have during the day, [mentally and/or physically], which practices people engage in order to surmount those challenges and what are the outcomes for the worker and the work itself. My goal is to map out which activities are employed, the main reasons to do so and the consequences of such behaviour. Moreover, it is also important to understand when these activities take place during the day and their impact on the performance of the worker.

There is already some literature related to the subject, mainly linked to the activities themselves while the challenges and the outcomes are still to cover. D'Abate (2005) studied what is that people do at work when they in fact are not working. Hamermesh (1990) tried to answer the question whether on-the-job leisure represented unproductive shirking or productive schmoozing, concluding that breaks are important but too many are prejudicial.

The present project aims to develop this subject especially regarding the relation between the challenges and the practices the worker face during the work day. Throughout 20 interviews and with the help of a guideline specifically drawn for this project, it is expected to fully cover the work day routine and to emphasise the time employees take off from work and engage in other activities. It was important to get information as detailed as possible and so it was asked the interviewees do describe a normal day focusing on all pauses.

The core matter of this project is related to individual's behaviour and actions. The project is comprised in the Organisational Studies area as these individuals are integrated in companies and are studied at the organizational level. It is important to understand the reasons, if any, of engaging in non-working activities at work and what is the practical implication of that on the worker performance and on the work itself. The project has the purpose of seek and validate the reasons and to find out what outcomes can emerge from such conditions.

## **2. A Review of Relevant Literature**

### **Interruptions of tasks, Boundaries and micro role transitions, and the role of interruptions in organizational life**

In the Organizational Studies Area there are some relevant studies related to work and non-work activities. Mainly these studies focus on whether the activities are or are not related to the job itself and when are these activities performed. This project will aim to understand not only if the activities are work related or not but the challenges the practices and the outcomes related to those activities.

In the early 1990's, Daniel S. Hamermesh conducted a study to examine how changes in the use of time on the job affect earnings. Since World War II there has been a rapid increase in two types of leisure that may affect workers' productivity. The first is the well-known increase in paid time off from work - vacations, holidays, and sick days. The less well-known increase is the rise in time spent at work but not working. Time spent on the job but relaxing can increase workers' productivity by enabling them to rest when they are physically or mentally fatigued. Understanding the effects of on-the-job leisure on productivity informs us about the structure of the demand for workers and thus about the possible impact of such policies as overtime pay requirements, payroll taxes, and minimum wages. This is the first comprehensive study to relate time use to wages. As such, it tries to answer whether on-the-job leisure represents unproductive shirking or productive *schmoozing* [socializing with workmates that adds to productivity] (Shrank, 1978). This study has the intention to relate break time with some conclusive outcomes such as that further growth in on-the-job leisure would reduce productivity; that monitoring workers would yield returns to the firm but, and more important, that entirely elimination of breaks would be counterproductive. These outcomes can become a conflict in the sense that the worker may not accept well the fact that he is being monitored and also it is quite difficult to know where the boundary between productive and unproductive leisure is. A different view over interruptions was conducted by Blake E. Ashforth, Glen E. Kreiner, Mel Fugate (2000) related to the nature of *role transitions* – that is, the psychological (and, where relevant, physical) movement between roles, including disengagement from one role (role exit) and engaging in another (role entry; Burr, 1972; Richter, 1984). The central question is *how do individuals engage in daily role transitions as part of*

*their organizational life?* The focus is on the transition process, developing propositions regarding the psychological (and, if relevant, physical) movement between roles. Describing role transitions as a boundary-crossing activity, where one exits and enters roles by surmounting boundaries (Schein, 1971; Van Maanen, 1982), the model is illustrated with examples from the three major domains of everyday role transition involving work: (1) work-home transition, (2) work-work or at-work transitions, (3) work-“third place” transitions.

This approach to role transitions may be an effective instrument to my analysis, particularly why the bigger breaks are done right after getting to the work place (Work – Home transition) and right after lunch (Work – “Third place” transitions). As to the second domain - work-work or at-work transitions – it will help a way to evaluate the subordinate/peer/superior relation. Finding whether leisure on-the-job is unproductive shirking or productive schmoozing and the transitions people have to do during the day imply a first question “What do people do at work when they are not working?”

### **3. Methods**

In order to collect the necessary information to conduct my study I used a qualitative approach to gather in-dept understandings of what people do at work when they are not working. The qualitative research choice was due to its ability to fulfil the research purpose, the affluence in data and its flexibility. Distinctive from a quantitative research in many ways the qualitative research method is most used when there is a

lack of knowledge in the area and it is recognized for the ability to discover the underlying nature of the subject (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

### **3.1. Data Selection**

Participants were chosen in order to meet a certain criterion: middle-management employees who work in office jobs. The reasons why this criterion was established were, first mid-hierarchy positions resulted in a set of individuals with moderate degree of autonomy in their work situation who had the opportunity to perform non working activities on the job and second having office jobs allowed the access to the media (e.g. cell-phones, e-mail, internet) which, as will be stated later on, are some of the most common reasons to engage in non working related activities. Neither individuals in high level jobs, nor individuals in low level jobs qualify for these interviews: individuals in high-level jobs partly because of the great amount of autonomy that would make it difficult to distinguish between work time and free time (e.g. meetings and professional phone calls with friends); individuals in low-level jobs primarily because they did not have enough autonomy to engage in non working activities during work hours. Moreover, job categories such as factory workers that did not have regularly access to the media were rejected by the criteria.

The target was young workers with no more than 4 years of experience with a high level of education, at least a bachelor or a degree. The group of twenty individuals was 60 percent male, only 20 percent were already married and 70 percent was still living with their parents. They work for different industries and in different professional areas, such as, Finance, Sales, Law, Marketing, Human Resources and Government.



With the purpose of relaxing the participants and to get from them honest answers the interviews were made outside the work place and on leisure periods.

### **3.2. Data Collection**

Twenty interviews were conducted to young workers, preferentially people that were in job office and that were not in a leadership position. The information collected with the interviews will be the core of this study. With the purpose of collecting the needed information, a guideline for the interviews was made. The intention of that guideline was not to ask direct questions to the respondent but to guide the interviewer. One important aspect was to get detailed information about the day-to-day work in order to better understand the pauses that were made, their reasoning and consequences. During the interviews it was asked for a detailed description of the work day. The day was divided into mornings and afternoons. The lunch was not taken into account as it is a break done by everyone.

The first part of the interview regarded the description of the respondents' last work day since they arrive at the work place, regarding work related activities and the pauses that were done during the morning and the afternoon. In the second part, questions were made related to the handling of personal matters at work and the superior's reaction to that. Attempting to identify some kind of pattern of reasoning from the collected data along with these open-ended questions, the aim was to understand why they engage in such behaviour, what motivated them to do so, and what in their own interpretation justifies that conduct.

The interviews were recorded with permission. The recorded data were then transcribed by the researcher. After the transcription, the collected information was

carefully analyzed and it was possible to conclude for some emerging patterns about which non working activities people engage on, the reasons and the timing. In particular, all of them admitted that they break during the day, they agree that the level of productivity varies along the work day; and that pausing has a positive effect; Information was processed into a matrix of (i) time line (e.g. morning and afternoon); (ii) common types of activities(e.g. surf the internet, check on the personal emails, smoke); (iii) the reasons for and the consequences of those pauses in the productivity (e.g. to motivate, to relax, to help to concentrate). The analysis and the results will be described and discussed later.

#### **4. Results**

With the purpose of analyzing the data the results will be structured into a framework starting with the challenges that workers face, what practices they make use of in order to overcome those challenges and what are the outcomes for the worker and for the work it self. In the Appendix it is possible to see two different tables. Table 1 refers to the challenges workers face during the day; these challenges are sometimes the reasons to devote some time to pauses. In Table 2 it is summarized what people do during break time, which practices\activities. This is the process of engaging in non working activities. People have reasons\challenges to do a pause, in that pause certain activities\practices are performed and they have consequences\outcomes for the worker and the work itself.

#### **4.1. Challenges\ Reasons**

##### **4.1.1. Role Transition**

A common challenge to most of the interviewees is related to the Home - Work transition. Workers need some time to exit the role they act upon at home and to enter the new role at work, as said by Interviewee nº 11, *“(...) as soon as I get to the office I usually follow ritual. First I turn the computer on and check my emails, during this period I often eat my breakfast. In order to save some time I eat at the computer. Than I read my emails, I organize my work load having attention to what is more urgent and what I left unfinished the day before. If there is time I try to take a quick look at the front page of some Journals (...)”*, also in the same line of reasoning interviewee nº8 said, *“(...) the first thing I do as I get to the office is to read my professional emails and than my personal ones. I also have a small meeting with my boss in order to structure what will be the plan for the day (...)”*. This first break can be seen as the period people need in order to enter in their professional “character”.

One other challenge that can also be related to the role transition model is the break done by some interviewees after lunch. In this case we are presented with a “Third Place” - Work transition, been the “Third Place”, in the particular case, the lunch restaurant. As said by Interviewee nº 2 *“(...) when I get back from lunch it is difficult to get back on the rhythm. It is a time when I feel more inactive and it is very complicated the process to starting to work again. It always takes more time (...)”* and to complement this idea Interviewee nº 17 said *“(...) the fact that I usually lunch with my friends and not me colleges is one reason why when I get back to the office it takes some time for me to settle down, the other reason is the change in the environment:*

*one is a more relax, more friendly while the other is more strict where I have responsibilities and work to be done (...)*”.

The last major domain of everyday role transitions involving work is the Work – Work transition or At – Work transitions. Here it is necessary that workers have some versatility especially when changing from a subordinate position to a superior position and even when talking to colleges as a peer or as a boss. These circumstances were verified in situations where the interviewee had already achieved a position inside the organization that put him in charge of a small team. One of the cases is the Interviewee nº 15 that said, “(...) the idea of having someone beneath and above me implies that I adjust my behaviour depending in which position I am [subordinate, peer, superior], and it entails a certain amount of knowledge about how to behaviour in such different roles (...)”, a different perspective of this subject was given by Interviewee nº 5 “(...) sometimes I invite my team to break with me, it is my method of working. Although I am in a leader position I believe it is important to approximate both parts. With my boss it is different, even though we have a weekly meeting outside the office to promote the communication between us (...)”

#### **4.1.2. Pressure**

Another challenge workers have to overcome is related to pressure. There is times when it is requested from the employees an extra devotion to work, when they need to be able to work for long hours and to perform better their job. During these periods, the time to break is much reduced and it must be used wisely. In a situation of high pressure the break can have two main goals. The first one concerns the idea already discussed that even in hard times workers need to stop, as Interviewee nº 12 said “(...)

*obviously when I have a lot of work to do I try to get to the office and start working, but it is important to say that even during those periods it is beneficial to break once or twice (...)*"; the second relates high pressure to stress and the difficulties to solve problems under such conditions, as Interviewee nº8 said *"(...)when work is not going so well I prefer to break for a couple of minutes and relax hoping that when I get back to work I will be less stressful and more likely to solve the problems I have at hand(...)"*, also Interviewee nº 10 said *"(...) usually I stop when I feel stuck in a problem, it helps me release the stress (...)"*.

Hence, inevitably there will be moments of high tension and pauses function as a good tool to better perform on the job.

#### **4.1.3. Stimulated**

From the analysis of the interviewees, clearer it became that people need to be and keep stimulated to better perform their jobs. Enthusiasm is a constant challenge to the employees and it has a strong impact on their work day. There are two ways to analyse the relation between breaks and stimulus. The first one implies that the employee stimulates himself by knowing that when the work is done he can stop for a few minutes [enthusiasm to break], as Interviewee nº 11 said *"(...) the fact that I know that if I work hard and well I can make a break, it helps me to do my job as good and fast as possible (...)"*; the second one is more obvious and it expresses the enthusiasm of the worker after a break [enthusiasm break]. One example was stated by Interviewee nº 14, *"(...) breaks can have many implications on my work day. One is obvious to me and it is that after a break I am much more stimulated to do my assignments (...)"*. Thus, a stimulated worker is more likely to be fruitful and pauses are an important stimulus.

#### **4.1.4. Time Constrains**

Workers have personal needs and spending at least 8 hours on the job does not leave that much time off to take care of other issues related to the workers' personal lives. The challenge will be to reconcile both professional and personal issues at the same time in the same place. This will originate activities non work related, while at work.

This situation was pointed out by Interviewee nº12 when he said *"(...) I get to work early in the morning and often I leave at night, so if I do not take care of home life on the job when will I take care of it? (...)"* and Interviewee nº9 had the same opinion *"(...) the truth is that I do not have an alternative rather than take care of personal issues on the job. I am at the company 13 hours a day, so if I do not take care of those issues there, what is the other choice? (...)"*. It is essential that employers and employees understand these issues and that both are responsible in their actions.

#### **4.1.5. Opportunity**

The challenge presented here has a very simple interpretation: the fact that most of interviewees work at the computer and with access to the internet, to the mobile phones [owned by almost everyone nowadays] and to other types of devices that in a glance put a person in contact with the outside world, is a reason why people engage in breaks, mainly small breaks. As Interviewee nº 2 said, *"(...) I work on the computer and with internet the all day, the fact is that it makes my life easy and I do not lose that much time (...)"*; to complement this idea Interviewee nº9 stated that *"(...) I use the phone without any problems and if I need to make or receive a call I do it. I take care of all sorts of things at work from money transfers to details concerning my house (...)"*. Again and following the last point [Time Constrains] it can be seen that the fact that

workers have easy access to the means, makes it opportune to engage in other activities non work related. Relevant here is that companies and employees must have conscience that there are things that have to be taken care on the work place but it should not be prejudicial to work itself.

#### **4.1.6. Mental Overload**

After analysing the interviews two types of “Mental Overload” were found and one of them was pointed out by the majority of the interviewees - the notion of mental overload for this group concerns the moments when their mind could not take more time working, that time when they felt that they were not producing as much as they should and they decide to stop to “reset” the mind as some of them said. Opinions like *“(...) when I am having problems at work or with my work I often pause to clear my mind. It helps me to see the problem from the outside (...)”* said by Interviewee nº 16 and also *“(...) it is obvious that if I am feeling more tired or my head is not functioning as it should I change my plans and stop. The object of this pause is to put my head to rest for a quick moment, to reset my mind and then when I start working again I feel more capable (...)”* said by Interviewee nº 4, clearly make it simple to understand this challenge. Only a few suggested that their challenge was not only to stop working and rest their mind, they need to leave the office and to take some fresh air, as an example is Interviewee nº 17 that said *“(...) in moments when I am feeling more tired I prefer to leave the office, I do not mind to lose 10 or 15 minutes because I know that my performance will increase right after getting back. For me fresh air is very important in these moments (...)”*.

As a conclusion, to stop working is the best way to help improving the mind's capacity although it is not the only way. To leave the office environment and take some fresh air is a possible alternative.

#### **4.1.7. Work Purpose**

Another challenge referred connected work activities with breaks. Cases like going to meetings, work trips or even just to ask a doubt can instigate a break moment. The idea of moving from one's office to the meeting's office and getting back is normally understood as a break time, as Interviewee nº 7 said *"(...) the path to a meeting and the way back are breaks. I may be at work but the fact that I have to go out it feels like break (...)";* When the worker is asked to go take care of some work issue outside the office and it involves a small trip is also connect to break time although there are performing a work tasks, to support this linkage we have the testimonial of Interviewee nº 10 *"(...) in what pauses concerns I have to underline that in my internship I have to go out quick often in work assignments and I consider those as a break. I am working but the idea of getting away from the office helps me to relax and to rest from the intense environment I work on (...)";* The last one is associated with the beginning of the professional life and the notion that workers do not have enough knowledge to perform all their tasks. In this situation the best way to overcome the problem is to ask someone for a second opinion or a more experienced for help. It was stated by many interviewees that doubt related conversation in many cases ends up as a social conversation. Interviewee nº 19 made a perfect description of this notion, *"(...) I do not have enough knowledge yet to know how to solve all the problems I face every*



*day. Often I have doubts and the fastest way is to ask someone and obvious this conversation ends being a social conversation and a small moment of pause (...)*”.

It is important to clarify that there are work activities that instigate a pause. In this section it was showed three situations where it was clear that even though performing a work activities employees take advantage of that time to engage in non work related activities.

#### **4.1.8. Need**

Until now it has been described situations where the employee took advantage of some free time to devote his attention to issues related to different matters. Now the challenge are situations when the employee's only choice is to stop. There is a necessity to break and not only the will to break. To simplify this topic it was divided in two types of reasons. The first one that all the interviewees agreed on, concerns the eating breaks. According to Interviewee nº 13 *“(...) during the morning I usually stop once or twice to eat. It is not possible for me to work four hours without eating (...)”*; to complete this opinion Interviewee nº 3 said *“(...) it is imperative that I stop in the middle of the afternoon to eat. I usually leave late and without food in my stomach it is not possible to be productive (...)”*. The second one it is as important as the first one but not all connected it with a break. The bathroom “trips” are important to the well functioning of our body and everyone needs it. What happens is that not everyone links bathroom “trips” to breaks, but being they part of everyone's life they deserve a closest look, as interviewee nº 20 point out *“(...) I do not relate going to the bathroom to breaks but the fact is that I use the bathroom along the day because I have to (...)”*.

In conclusion it is important to underline the aspect that not all breaks are intentional, meaning that some of those are done because our human condition demands so.

#### **4.1.9. Trade-Off**

This is the last point concerning the challenges\reasons to engage in non working activities and it involves employers and employees. It is necessary that the employer has an open mind in the breaks paradigm because there are things that employees need to do like take care of some personal issues that have to be done while at work or if they leave early they will lose time that could have been productive for the company. This trade-off also implies an amount of common sense to the employee: it is reasonable to take care of some issues not related to work but they must be responsible in their actions. One interviewee explained the paradigm very easily saying *“(...) they [employer] know that been at the office for 8 to 10 hours I will take care of things that I need and want in the internet and even for my superiors it is better to do it there than leave early. They care about my work, if it is done on time and I do not spend the entire day on the phone or on the internet there will be no problems (...)”*.

#### **4.2. Practices\ Activities**

In order to overcome such challenges a number of practices were mentioned by the interviewees. Activities like organize the day, coffee break, the “in between tasks” breaks, read the news, surf the internet and others are some of the ways that people use to better execute their job.

#### **4.2.1. Organize the Day\ Put the Mind Up to Work**

The role transition is one of the biggest challenges a worker has to face along the day. Activities like organizing the day as soon as one gets to the office, read the news and check the professional emails together with the first coffee helps the employee to enter in the employer role. This goes in the same line of opinion of Interviewee nº 9 *“(...) the first thing I do when I get to work is to check my professional emails and establish a list of priorities to start work (...)”*. The same happens when coming back from the lunch break. The main difference here is that the activities the employee engages in are not so much related to work but more personal related like surfing the internet and checking personal emails. In accordance, Interviewee nº2 said *“(...) After launch is the most difficult part of my day, so before I start to work I, if I have the time, often surf the internet for about 15minutes (...)”*.

#### **4.2.2. Keep the Concentration Level\ Decompress**

The practices enunciated in this topic had two main focuses. On one hand there were practices that almost all the Interviewees agreed on. Activities done “in between” tasks, like a small conversation with a co-worker [in the case of doubt] or just to comment on something, to send an email, to respond to a text message or even listening to music, are responsible for quick moments of relaxation and decompression. To consolidate this idea Interviewee nº 13 believes that *“(...) it is very important to have those two minutes after finishing a task. I ask my colleagues how their work is going or what is new. It reduces tension (...)”*; in the case of Interviewee nº 3 he likes to *“(...) listening to music while working. It helps me concentrate but also because it makes my job more pleasant (...)”*.

On the other hand there were the activities performed mostly by people with addictions, the smokers and the coffee addicted. It is important to state that only a few interviewees were smokers but all of them linked the smoke break to improvements in their concentration levels. As an example Interviewee nº 6 confirmed *“(...) this [smoke and coffee break] are breaks that help me focus on my work, it is a time when I am feeling more tired and the break gives me strength to go back to work (...)”*; one of the others smoker, Interviewee nº18, said *“(...) during the work day I try to smoke only one or two cigarettes. More would mean more breaks and too many breaks can be prejudicial. For me the cigarette breaks is a concentration tool, I go out I smoke my cigarette and in less than 3 minutes I am back working (...)”*.

In the analysis of this topic it was made clear that there are activities that once done by the worker, have a positive impact on their work. For example, probably if a smoker does not go out to smoke he will be much more stressed and if a worker stays for the entire day without talking it may not be good for the work environment or for himself. This leads as to our next practice.

#### **4.2.3. Quick Look Over the World**

Nowadays, internet is the privileged mean to be rapidly connected to the world. In fact interviewees that, for example, reading online newspapers have become an habit. Interviewee nº 8 takes benefit of his middle morning eat break to *“(...) take a quick look over the news and some other internet sites of on time information (...)”*; also Interviewee nº 5 takes as a necessary action to *“(...) in moments of pause, take a look over the most important papers, economics, sports or leisure related, and to read in more detail some specific new that drawn my attention (...)”*. It is known that almost

everyone check the news online but Interviewee nº 12 point out one other interesting point saying that *“(...) here [at the work place] we are encouraged to be update and that can only be done with the help of the internet (...)”*.

It is important for the companies to have informed employees and to encourage them to have more interest on the news and more specifically on their area of business. It can only bring benefits for both sides.

#### **4.2.4. Take Care of Personal Life**

This topic is connected to the challenge of time constrains. Workers need time to take care of their personal issues and the fact that they spend most of the day on the office does not leave other choice rather than taking care of those same issues at the work place. There are many ways of solving personal issues and the most mentioned were through the phone and the internet. This is the case of interviewee nº 3 that *“(...) regularly make a break during the morning to use the phone, it takes no longer than ten minutes. I prefer to leave the work area but not building, usually I stay on the kitchen or in the elevator’s area (...)”*; but there are also the case of using the internet for personal purpose and in date case the worker do not even need to move from his desk, as Interviewee nº 14 said *“(...) it very easy when I have something to take care and I can do it over the internet. I have my computer always on and everything is at a distance of a click (...)”*. With the new technologies everything can be done through the internet or the mobile phones where you can reach everyone everywhere. People take these actions because they need to and the employer should incite this behaviour because it is better for the company that an employee loses 10 minutes on the phone or on the internet rather than one hour just to go to a bank or take care of other issues.

#### **4.2.5. Socializing\ Improving Work Environment**

More than just a practice along the day it is part of the human behaviour. When you part of an organization and working in a team, is it not only a basic need but also a good work practice. It helps improving the work environment and it has positive impacts for the company because it is important that people trust their subordinates, peers and superiors. Also communication between all departments can bring people closer to each other creating a good and safe work atmosphere. Interviewee nº4 when asked about this issue gave a simple example *“(...) in times when the work environment is more intense for any reason (...) it [the break] is an idea of my superiors (...)”*; this to explain that strengthening the relations between workers is very important and already there are people in the leadership positions that understand it and have some plans of action. Other perspective was given by Interviewee nº 5 when he said *“(...) each department has its own space and we only communicate from time to time. I think it is important to go to other departments and talk a little bit to see how things are going and it has a positive aspect that it improves the inter-department relations (...)”*. Concluding, it is important that superiors take action when they feel their teams are down and it is also important to encourage workers to get to know better the organization and other workers from different departments because it can only bring positive results.

To finish this result analysis there is one other aspect that is worth discussion. In all the interviews it was asked the workers what was, in their view, the opinion their superiors have in what concerns the breaks they do along the day. The answers were all in the same line of reasoning apart from those that had never talked about it within the

organization. For most of them the superiors consider that breaks are a way to improve productivity. Interviewee nº 7 said *“(...) I think they [superiors] need these breaks as we to better perform the job. Because of that when they see us going for a break probably they think that our performance was not good enough and when we get back our will and strength will be higher (...)”*; there are also examples of superiors calling subordinates to stop and pause for a moment this shows that breaks are taken into account in the organization but there is also a catch, it is important that the worker has the necessary responsibility to know when he can or cannot make a pause because what is really important are the results we show at the end of the day. To support this second idea Interviewee nº 1 stated that *“(...) my work evaluated in terms of results I present. So I can spend the entire day doing pauses and chatting with friends or colleagues and take the work to do at home. For my boss what counts is the result I present at the deadline (...)”*; to complete this idea Interviewee nº 15 also said *“(...) I have never had a conversation about this issue but I know, from what I see, that if I want I can stay eight hours surfing the internet or playing games that nobody cares. They care about results not the way I got there (...)”*.

In conclusion, although there is generalized practice regarding pauses, there is still a culture of results and those results can be improved in a organization where the value of your behaviour and the well being of all the workers and the relationships between them.

## **5. Conclusion and Future Research**

After an analysis of the results gathered from the research on the topic “What do people do at work when they are not working?” and with the objective of better understand the challenges workers face along the work day and what practices they engage in – non work related – to overcome those challenges four main conclusions can be made.

The first conclusion concerns the morning and the after lunch break. As explained earlier in the model of Role Transitions these two breaks are a concrete fact that people need some time to exit a role and enter in the new role. In the morning break [Home – Work Transition] the worker leaves his home and his role as a family member and when arriving at the office the first thing he needs is time to adapt to the organizational environment; The afternoon break [“Third-Place” – Work Transition] happens after the lunch break and the worker comes from a more relaxed environment and again needs time to reorganize himself into the organizational attitude.

Second, it is important to state that it is not good for the employee or for the sake of his work to work hours in a row without breaking. Breaks will help the employee in several ways, namely to achieve moments of high productivity, to relieve some pressure and accumulated stress, to “reset” the mind and also to keep a high level of concentration.

The question of personal issues at the work places gives us the third conclusion. People spend great part of the day at the office and usually there is not much time left to take care of their personal lives. It is important to balance work and personal issues and to do so the worker needs to take some time of his day to take care of his own issues.



The last conclusion links the need to be in touch with the outside world with the socialization requirement among workers. Being at the office should not impede the communication with the outside world. As some of the interviewees said, some of their bosses even encourage them to use the internet to be aware of what is going on in the country and in the world. Another important thing is the need to establish relationship among workers in order to have a better environment at the work place.

Because of time and length constraints it was necessary to limit the scope of this work project. This project concerned young workers in an office job. Future researches could try to analyse how results would be different if the study concerned workers in a different stage of their professional lives or/and different areas of business. For instance, it would be interesting to see how things were done in a lawyer's office in comparison with a multinational company or an architect's office. Knowing the activities people engage in at work it would also be tempting to analyse which of those are more beneficial and more prejudicial for the worker's productivity and how could the employer prevent those situations. Moreover one could question whether it is a matter of personal responsibility or should there be rules of conduct established by the employer. In fact, one of the participants of the present study stated that during work much of the professional information was shared by email and that obliged him to have his email account always on. This fact was counter-productive, and he stated that in periods when he needs to be more focused he had to turn off the computer in order to have some time free from the pressure of constantly receiving professional emails. This is an example of prejudicial activities where it is not only the worker to blame but where the company plays an active part.

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## **Appendices**

### **Guião para entrevistas**

#### *Introdução:*

Boa tarde. Em primeiro lugar gostaria de agradecer a sua disponibilidade para esta entrevista. Tem como objectivo reunir informação para a minha tese de mestrado “What do people do at work when they are not working?”. Gostaria de perceber o que faz quando, no horário de trabalho, não está a trabalhar, o que o leva a fazer essas pausas no trabalho e que consequências têm no desempenho da sua função.

*Início:* (Consoante as respostas, tentar explorar ao máximo as pausas do trabalhar, as suas razões e as influências/consequências no dia-a-dia)

- Pedia-lhe que começasse por me descrever o seu dia-a-dia de trabalho, a que horas chega ao seu local de trabalho e o que faz assim que chega. Pedia-lhe que a descrição fosse o mais detalhada possível.
- No período da manhã, faz alguma (ou mais do que uma) pausa no seu trabalho? Essas pausas são feitas com que objectivo? E fá-las sozinho ou acompanhado? A iniciativa dessas pausas é sua ou dos seus colegas?
- No que refere à hora de almoço, quanto tempo utiliza? Vai almoçar com quem, com colegas ou outras pessoas fora do ambiente de trabalho? Quais os temas de conversa?
- Voltando agora ao local de trabalho, depois do almoço recomeça de imediato a trabalhar? E durante a tarde que pausas, se alguma, faz?
- Utiliza o tempo de trabalho para tratar de assuntos pessoais (por exemplo uso do email pessoal, do messenger, do telemóvel particular)?
- Qual a opinião dos seus superiores relativamente a pausas, a tratamento de assuntos pessoais e ao uso de internet para fins não relacionados com o trabalho?

**Table 1** – Challenges

Reasons	Examples and Individual Comments
Transitions	In the morning and after lunch are periods where the transition from one role to another is more relevant. Interviewee n° 20 “(…) one I get to the office I need some time to accommodate my self. Of course I use that period to do some things like turn the computer on and go grab a coffee. It does not take me 10 min and i end up reading my emails and checking the news online so it is no useless time (…)”
Pressure	Because during stressful times the productivity is not so high Inter. n° 8 “(…) when work is not going so well I prefer to break for a couple of minutes and relax hoping that when I get back to work I will be less stressful and more likely to solve the problems I have at hand(…)”
Motivation	“(…) the fact that I know that that if I work hard and well I can make a break it motivates me to do my job as good and fast as possible (…)” Interviewee n° 11
Time constraints	The fact that people spent most of the day at work, Interviewee n° 12 “(…) I get to work early in the morning and often I leave at night, so if I do not take care of home life on the job when will I take tare of it?(…)”
Handiness	Because emails, the phone and the internet are just there “(…) I work on the computer and with internet the all day the fact is that it makes my life easy and I do not lose that much time(…)”Inter. n°1
Clear mind	“(…) when I am having problems at work or with my work I often pause to clear my mind. It helps me to see the problem from the outside (…)” Interviewee n° 16
Work purpose	Meetings, small trips and other occasions that are related to work but promote leisure. Interviewee n° 7 “(…) the path to a meeting and the way back are breaks. I may be at work but the fact that I have to go out it feels like break (…)”
Need	Pauses related to bathroom, eating breaks. Interviewee n° 13\n°20 “(…) during the morning I usually stop once or twice to eat because I can not work for four hours with out eating (…); “(…) I do not relate going to the bathroom to breaks but the fact is that I use the bathroom along the day because I have to (…)”
Trade-off	Workers spend so much time at work that it is, at least, reasonable to engage in personal activities. Interviewee n° 1 “(…) it is better for my employer that I take care of personal business at work than if I leave earlier and lose time that could have been productive (…)”

**Table 2** – Practices\Activities

Activity		Examples and Individual comments
Morning	Afternoon	
Emails		Emails concerning work; “(…) the first thing I do when I get to work is to check my professional emails and establish a list of priorities to start work (…)” (Enter. 9)
	Coffee	To help me stay awake “(…) If I have a lot of work I choose to do a quick coffee break right after lunch (…)”
	Tea	To eat and chat a little bit with my colleges “(…) When the work load is normal I tend to get together with some of my closest colleges and we do a break to coffee or eat something (…)”
	Doubt related	Someone needs help with something related to work “(…) When someone comes to my office with a doubt work related after resolving the problem often we end up talking about some other issues non-work related (…)”
Paying personal bills, Order something,		“(…) I spend the day in front of the computer and if I have something to do and I can do it from the internet (…)”
Using the phone		Make or receive calls from friends or family and to take care of personal matters “(…) Obviously I don’t spend my day on the phone but if I need to take care of something or to talk to some one there is no problem (…)”
Leisure reading		Newspapers (e.g. Público, A bola, Record, Diário Económico) “(…) Usually in the morning I open in the internet just to read the front page or some more interesting new (…)”

**Table 1** (Continued)

Activity		Examples and Individual Comments
Morning	Afternoon	
Coffee		Time to stop a little bit, relax and eat “(…) Since the morning is the most productive part of the day I work for two hours than I stop to eat and sometimes even go out to get some fresh air (…) and most of the times I prefer to go alone”
	Surfing the internet	Search for sports resumes and scores, for travel agencies and prices, funny sketches “(…) After launch is the most difficult part of my day, so before I start to work I, if I have the time, often surf the internet for about 15min(…)” Interviewee nº 2
	Personal emails	“(…) Since I do not to start right after launch, I open my personal account to see and if necessary to respond to some of my personal emails (…)”
	Smoke	“(…) I smoke one or two cigars during my work day. In the morning a void it because to smoke I have to leave the building and so only during the afternoon (…)”
	In between tasks	“(…) breaks are a way of structuring the work day, after finishing a task and before starting a new one you do a small break to relax and reset the mind (…)”
Bathroom breaks		“(…) although I do not consider going to the bathroom a break, the fact is that I often go. During the morning one or twice but during the afternoon is much more common (…)”
	Social Conversations	Conversation about sports, books, travel (non work related) “(…) it is a small pause where I might get into a conversation, usually about a funny email, or something like that (…)”
	Work trips	“(…) in the internship we often have to leave the office to take care of some work, and even though I am working during that “trip” I consider it a break(…)”

